

Twitter Thread by Dr Fish Philosopher Todd (Dr FPT)■



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1. I was walking in the woods yesterday and I had an epiphany. It wasn't one I wanted to have. I was thinking about today's class, where we are reading Kimmerer's 'Gathering Moss'. I've taught Braiding Sweetgrass in multiple classes every year since 2016. It's eminently teachable

2. Both books are beautifully written. Students uniformly enjoy them as assigned reading. They do a great job communicating to non-Indigenous folks the contours of basic Indigenous relationships to more-than-human beings. They're wildly popular with white readers.

3. I've found Braiding Sweetgrass to be a great entry point for non-Indigenous folks to Indigenous scholarship. But this is where yesterday's epiphany comes in. Neither Braiding Sweetgrass or Gathering Moss tends to the deep deep lineages of Indigenous scholarship in Canada or US

4. As the popularity of 'Braiding Sweetgrass' has soared, I've seen more and more white folks wax on about 'braiding knowledge'. But they often don't know any of the lineages of these concepts beyond what is presented in this one book. They confidently run with this.

5. Kimmerer does a commendable job of weaving in her own experiences, her family stories+nods to some very important knowledge keepers who deserve to be celebrated for their work. But Braiding Sweetgrass does not tend to the citational politics Sara Ahmed & others teach us about

6. Braiding Sweetgrass was published in 2013. At a time when Indigenous Studies was active, & Indigenous scholars in Canada and the US have been working to share Indigenous knowledge in and beyond the academy for many many decades. An Indigenous writer in the US would know this.

7. Without the citational politics that tend to these deep lineages of work, non-Indigenous readers are wont to imagine they have found the 'first' foray into Indigenous critiques of science. And to think that pan-Indigenous discourses can be forced onto all Indigenous contexts.

8. White readers love Indigenous work that's not threatening. Why confront what Vine DeLoria had to say about white scholars in '69 when you can read something from 2013 that talks about reciprocity (but ironically without fully reciprocal citations of other native scholarship).

9. I doubt this was intentional. But how white scholars — particularly scientists — read Indigenous scholarship should frequently be assumed to be extractive and, often, incurious. Indigenous folks have been publishing, advocating, vocalizing critiques of academe for centuries.

10. White scholars love to import place-based knowledge from other Indigenous nations & drop this onto Indigenous societies in a weirdly imperialist way. That's why they love 'Indigenization' but often balk at addressing specific Indigenous societies whose homeland they occupy

11. See Vanessa Watts' 'Indigenous Place Thought' (2013) for cogent explanation of this in Canada/US.

12. Sorry gotta run! Be back from an appointment in a bit.

13. Ok, finished my meeting and have had a snack. Ready to finish my thoughts on yesterday's epiphany about 'Braiding Sweetgrass'.

14. In 'Indigenous Place-Thought', scholar Vanessa Watts (2013) draws on Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee philosophy/cosmologies to firmly demonstrate we cannot take Indigenous knowledge from one place and plop it into another context without doing violence to this knowing-being.

15. Watts (2013) explains this as Indigenous onto-epistemology (knowing-being) — thought is co-created *in* and *with* place. That's why Indigenous frameworks cannot be taken from one place-context to another without doing violence.
<https://t.co/YbxW7ghHod>

16. this is why a concept that white people in Canada love — Indigenization — is problematic. As Troy Storfjell explains — Indigenous is an 'analytic': <https://t.co/efD5OaOe1R>

thus, 'Indigenous' describes a set of relationships. But this flattens specific cosmologies

Indigeneity is an analytic, not an identity. S'xe1mi is an identity. Kanaka Maoli is an identity. Lakota and Anishinabe and Puyallup are identities. Indigeneity describes a certain set of relationships to colonialism, anticolonialism and specific lands and places.

— Troy Storfjell (@storfjta) [January 20, 2021](#)

17. I'm guilty of using the 'indigenizing' framework early in my career; I didn't fully appreciate that it flattens specific cosmologies, laws, stories & erases the co-constitutive nature of Watts' (2013) important concept of Indigenous Place-Thought and Indigenous knowing/being.

18. To bring the whole thread together: when Indigenous scholars don't explicitly reference long histories of plural Indigenous scholarship from many different Indigenous nations/societies across many homelands, white folks flatten a work to 'The Indigenous' voice: One and Only.

19. Non-Indigenous scholars in the US and Canada have not been adequately taught Troy Storfjell's point that the category of Indigenous is simply an analytic. So they confidently wax on about 'Indigenizing science' or 'Indigenizing academe' and

hold up a handful of popular works

20. But Indigenous societies represent myriad different cosmologies, laws, languages, homelands, onto-epistemologies, and Indigenous Place-Thought (Watts 2013). And Indigenous folks have worked for generations inside and outside academe to tell these plural but specific stories.

21. The way white folks have taken up 'Braiding Sweetgrass' is rooted in white efforts to erase the specificity of each Indigenous society, each place, and the laws and cosmologies inherent in each homeland and flatten this to a homogeneous, interchangeable 'Indigenous knowledge'

22. So this is why it's so important for Indigenous scholars to make sure we cite existing work inside and outside academe really unambiguously, to disrupt the white imaginaries of what 'Indigenous ways of knowing' look like.

23. The work that needs to be done is actually in dismantling the idea that academic places in Canada and the US exist outside the stolen lands they occupy. Decolonizing, anti-colonial work has to attend to the complicated histories that universities occupy.

24. This means white folks have to resist the urge to mobilize concepts like 'braiding knowledge' or 'Indigenization' if they haven't spent time learning about Indigenous cosmologies, laws, languages, stories of the homelands they draw an income from, and/or own property in.

25. Further, white scholars must be accountable to intertwined & colliding genocides in homelands they are working in — how does Indigenous genocide, histories of enslavement of African peoples, forced displacement of people through Canadian & American imperialism shape your uni?

26. So to sum up: Braiding Sweetgrass is a beautiful book. I'll keep teaching it, but as always, will teach it alongside Black, Indigenous, and anti-imperialist scholarship from centuries of resistance to western science, nation-states, and colonization.

27. For an idea of how I've tried to teach this book but also situate it within context of other lines of inquiry, you can check out the online materials I've shared here for #INDG2015 (but this is just a start — there are many other sources to check out) <https://t.co/1PnC8hxf0w>